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SENSITIVE
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STATE PASS AF/FO FOR WOLPE, KEITH AND LASRY, AF/C FOR
LAMORA, AND EUR/WE FOR MARCUS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [SOCI](#) [CG](#) [BE](#)
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR S/E HOWARD WOLPE'S MEETING WITH
BELGIAN MFA AND COOPERATION

Summary:

[¶](#)1. (SBU) Your visit will develop further the already close U.S. - Belgium strategic dialogue that has developed over the past year. MFA contacts will be excited to discuss the new Administration's developing perspective and policies on Africa, especially the Great Lakes region. Secretary Clinton met with former FM De Gucht in January and March; Acting A/S Carter met with the Belgians mander Yates met civicials, parliamentarians, tring her March visit, Secpsed a Belgian Mission tecurity sector reform for which has not yettly, the U.S. and Belgium level SS @ h`rriorities in Africa. cooperation official3ltation meeting on assver a year. African coury beneficiaries of BelQnce, and the DRC a focign policy. Suggestedided at paragraph 8. Qitical Background

[¶](#)2. (SBU) Africa, an\$0tic Republic of the Cone a priority for the Brift in Belgium's relafollowed former FM De Gucht's public criticism of DRC President Kabi, a in 2008 has been partly repaired. A new, highly regarded Ambassador (former Belgian Ambasador to the U.S. Dominique Struye) is now in lace in Kinshasa. Belgium's new Consul-GeneraQ arrived in Lubumbashi on August 17, and the reopening ceremony should take place in September. The Consulate in Bukavu remains shuttereQ, although the GoDRC has indicated it can reo0en once certain Kimia II (joint DRC - Rwanda) ilitary exercise objectives have been met. BelQium remains very cautious about leadership roQes in African peacekeeping missions, a result of the death of its soldiers in Rwanda in 1994. De Gucht failed in a concerted effort late last year to persuade fellow EU nations to provide a "bridging force" to support MONUC in Eastern Congo. Ethnic European - Belgians have personal and family ties to the DRC, while current economic and commercial relations have dwindled. At least one-hundred thousand Belgian citizens are of African-Congolese decent, many recent immigrants. Belgian political interest in the DRC today centers to a significant degree on conflict resolution, human rights and humanitarian concerns.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

[¶](#)3. (SBU) Belgium remains focused on the humanitarian situation in the eastern DRC. Belgian officials are skeptical about recent and ongoing military cooperation between the DRC, Uganda and Rwanda against rebel groups. They would like to see comprehensive rapprochement between Kinshasa and Kigali, but are skeptical of the wisdom of the DRC inviting troops from other countries on to its territory in light of the potential for violence. Nevertheless, the Belgians are realistic about the limited impact of their efforts to improve the ability of the DRC military to provide security throughout the country. Former FM De Gucht told the Secretary March 6 that in his view strengthening the DRC military is fundamental to long term stability, and agreed to send a team to Washington to consult with U.S. counterparts on possible efforts to strengthen the DRC military. The Belgians have indicated a desire to send this team once the Administration's new Africa policy has been developed.

[¶](#)4. (SBU) Belgium is actively engaged in Security Sector Reform (SSR) in the DRC, and coordinates with the U.S. and other donors in the region on this topic. The MFA will co-host with State a May 12 meeting in Brussels for European and American SSR experts. The Belgian military provides a

handful of advisors to the DRC Ministry of Defense, as well as a team leader and eight observers to MONUC. Belgium is disappointed with the limited impact of its effort to train a battalion of Rapid Reaction Forces at Kananga, but the Ministry of Defense plans regular follow up training.

Sudan and Benin

15. (SBU) Belgium is also active in non-Great Lakes countries that border the Congo, and further afield in Francophone Africa. Five unarmed Belgian military observers have participated in the UN Mission in Sudan since its establishment in 2005. From January to April 2009, Belgium has deployed 75 troops in Benin who are constructing a shooting range and training facilities for peacekeepers. The Belgians have planned for regular follow up training. Two Belgian liaison officers support Benin's troops engaged in peacekeeping in Cote d'Ivoire with ONUCI.

Coordination with AFRICOM

16. (SBU) Cooperation between the Belgian MOD and the U.S. Africa Command is growing. Top Belgian Army officers have met with AFRICOM leadership on three occasions since March, including a visit by Deputy AFRICOM commander Yates to Brussels, a visit to AFRICOM headquarters by a Belgian military delegation to share lessons learned in west Africa, and a July 20 visit by AFRICOM staff to Brussels. AFRICOM officers have said they find the Belgians knowledgeable on Africa issues, with a high level of engagement at the senior ranks. As AFRICOM gears up to train a Congolese battalion, the Belgians have shared their insights into the opportunities and challenges inherent in training forces in the DRC. Belgium has expressed willingness to participate in the Africa Partnership Station (APS), first by providing Belgian trainers to accompany the mission, and later possibly by providing a ship to carry U.S. and other allied personnel on APS missions. The Belgians have also offered to provide a liaison officer for the U.S. Operation Shared Accord in Benin. The Belgian Defense Ministry is interested in providing a full-time liaison officer to AFRICOM's Stuttgart headquarters when AFRICOM is in a position to accept such officers.

Civilian Development Assistance

17. (SBU) In 2007, Belgium world development assistance totaled 1.4 billion euros, or 0.43% of its GDP. This figure was down from 0.5% in 2006. In 2007, the DRC was the largest recipient of Belgian aid at 153 million euros. Other large recipients were Cameroon, Rwanda and Burundi. Direct development aid administered by Belgian employees of Belgian Technical Assistance is limited to 18 "partner countries," of which 13 are in Africa. Other countries receive Belgian money via the UN or other international organizations and NGOs. The Embassy has worked to increase cooperation and coordination with Belgium on assistance to Africa. We are also focused on trying to get Belgium to increase assistance to Afghanistan, a key U.S. priority.

Suggested Talking Points:

18. (SBU) Key points to make in your meeting with Belgian officials:

-- We will soon be ready to receive a Belgian delegation to discuss ways to strengthen security in the DRC, following up on the conversation between the Secretary and former FM De Gucht.

-- We greatly appreciate Belgium's openness to AFRICOM and willingness to share experiences and lessons learned. We look forward to partnership with Belgium on Africa Partnership Station and other exercises.

-- We are eager to work with you to improve cooperation and coordination on delivery of aid to African countries. We also greatly appreciate the new resources you are providing for assistance to Afghanistan. In this difficult economic environment, it is more important than ever to ensure that resources remain available for the least advantaged countries.

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